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ABSTRACT

The institution of peer tutoring among black school children is the subject of this paper. The author acknowledges that while peer tutoring is not a new concept, the idea is resurging, especially among educators, because of: (1) the failure of the educational system to adequately prepare a large portion of urban youth educationally; (2) a preference for differentiated staffing which calls for the role of the teacher to range from dispenser to coordinator of knowledge; (3) more emphasis on individualized instruction; (4) concern over the high degree of competitiveness among students; and (5) the inadequacy of traditionally designed curricula and methodology to meet the needs of non-traditional students. A review of relevant literature on peer and cross-age tutorial programs within American society in general and among black females in particular, as well as an evaluation of a peer tutoring program in a black, inner city elementary school in Chicago, is included in this paper. It is suggested that peer tutoring helps to strengthen traditional black values and culture, as reflected in the positive attitudes among program participants. (AOS)

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PEER TUTORING:

A STRATEGY FOR BUILDING ON CULTURAL STRENGTHS

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Documentation and Technical Assistance in Urban Schools Project (DTA) is an effort to learn more about how to make urban public schools work better for urban students. Toward this end, DTA combines educational research and practice within one project. DTA's mandate has three interrelated parts:

> DOCUMENTATION - to study, using primarily ethnographic techniques, the ways in which selected urban schools organize themselves to solve problems. Documentation focuses upon nine sites throughout the country selected and funded by NIE to continue to engage in locally initiated improvement activities.
>
> TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE - to develop in practice specific strategies which are designed to improve urban public schooling. Technical assistance strategies are based in part upon documentation of useful practices in the nine funded sites.
>
> LINKAGE - to increase understanding, through observation of DTA's attempts to link documentation with technical assistance, of the processes through which research can be useful to practice, and practice can influence research.

Our work is designed to effect school improvement through direct work in urban public schools and through sharing what we learn with the following audiences: parents, teachers, and administrators of urban public schools; the educational research community; groups or agencies working to assist urban schools; policy makers.

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INTRODUCTION

Peer tutoring is far from being a recent discovery. References to its use are found throughout the recorded history of various early cultures. The ancient Greeks and Romans used peer tutoring, as did the Africans and the Hindus.

This working paper will focus on some of the experiences of the Chicago Region Technical Assistance Team while assisting in the planning, development and implementation of a peer tutoring program within a Black school district in Chicago. The first section will summarize the historical basis of the peer tutoring process in terms of its advocacy by noted scholars and educators in early cultures and then proceed to describe the results of more recent experiences using this process. The second section contains an account of our involvement with a district-wide peer tutoring program during the summer of 1976, and within one school during the following school year.

PEER TUTORING: BACKGROUND

The idea of youth learning from youth has its origins in earliest times:

> Recorded as early as the first century A.D., by Quintilian in his Institutio Oratoria, is the notion of younger children learning their lessons from older children.[1]

[1] Paolitto, 1976

Seventeenth century Czech educator, John Comenius, expressed it this way:

> The saying, "He who teachers others, teaches himself," is very true, not only because constant repetition impresses a fact indelibly on the mind, but because the process of teaching in itself gives a deeper insight into the subject taught...The gifted Joachim Fortius used to say that...if a student wished to make progress, he should arrange to give lessons daily in the subjects which he was studying, even if he had to hire his pupils.[2]

The use of peer tutoring during the days of the American frontier has been well documented. Most of us are familiar with "the little red schoolhouse" as portrayed in the writings of Twain, Cather, Wilder and others. Within these one room schools, it was common for older pupils to help the younger ones with their lessons. Peer tutoring, in these earlier forms, was an integral part of an educational process in which it was assumed that cultural strengths were internalized by older children and could be passed on to younger ones in unadulterated form.

The gradual emergence of teachers as a professional group with specialized training in instructional methods was accompanied by the decline and, finally, the abandonment of the use of peer tutoring. There is little or no mention of it in the literature generated from 1900 to 1960.

Within the past decade, educators have shown increasing interest in the use of peer and cross-age tutoring programs as strategies to ennance the quality of education being offered in urban schools. The growing popularity of these strategies may be viewed as the logical result of recent educational trends, i.e., (1) the growing realization, by parents, employers and other concerned citizens, that public education has failed

[2] Keatinge, 1976

to adequately educate a large percentage of the nation's urban youth, and the resultant demand for school/teacher accountability; (2) the move toward differentiated staffing, which redefines the teaching role as that of a coordinator and resource person rather than exclusively a dispenser of knowledge; (3) the emphasis on small group and individualized instruction as opposed to traditional whole or total group instruction; (4) public criticism and concern regarding the high degree of competitiveness fostered within schools; (5) the recognition that traditionally designed curricula and methodology have failed to meet the instructional needs of non-traditional students with diverse learning modes.

An examination of the literature concerning peer and cross-age tutorial programs implemented within American elementary and high schools during the past ten years clearly indicates their apparent success. Among the more noteworthy of these were: The Cross-Age Tutoring Programs set up by Peggy and Ronald Lippitt[3], the Youth Homework Helper Program[4], and the Pacoima Tutorial Community Project[5].

The National Commission on Resources for Youth[6] points to the recent development of peer tutoring from two Neighborhood Youth Corps programs in the summer of 1967 to thousands of programs in five hundred American cities. Sophie Bloom, in a manual on Peer and Cross-Age Tutoring in the Schools[7], refers to Melaragno's account[8] of over ten

[3] Lippitt, et al., 1969 [4] Deering, 1966 [5] Newmark and Melaragno, 1969
[6] Resources for Youth Newsletter, n.d. [7] Bloom, 1975 [8] Melaragno, 1974

thousand peer tutoring programs in the United States in 1970 and to her own discovery of seventy Ph.D. dissertations on tutoring in schools for a single (i.e. 1972-73) academic year.

Research studies of early 1960's peer and cross-age tutoring programs produced several unexpected and surprising results. For example, after conducting his observations of the tutorial program instituted by Mobilization for Youth, Inc., Robert D. Cloward noted:

> Clearly, the major impact of the tutorial experience was on the tutors themselves. This finding has implications both for education and for youth employment. Tutorial programs not only can provide older youth in a low income area with gainful employment, in the few instances where they are paid in cash, but can serve to upgrade their academic skills as well. Indeed, the high reading gains made by tutors, many of whom were reading far below grade level at the beginning of the study, raise the intriguing question of whether high school dropouts might be successfully employed as tutors, not just to help underachieving elementary school pupils, but to improve their own academic skills.[9]

More recent work also notes positive effects on tutors.[10] In addition, the published literature contains reports of work evaluating effects on tutees[11] and describing effective peer tutoring programs.[12]

Within Black families, sibling roles and responsibilities tend to be clearly defined and understood. Children are expected to share in the supervision, care and training of younger brothers and sisters. Through this experience, the older child, assuming a quasi-parental

[9] Cloward, 1967 [10] Frager and Stern, 1970; Strodtbeck and Granick, 1972
[11] Frager and Stern, 1970; Neidermeyer and Ellis, 1971; Harrison, et. al., 1972; Snapp, 1972; Strodbeck and Granick, 1972; Feldman, et.al., 1975; Stainback, et.a., 1975 [12] Newmark and Melaragno, 1969; Gartner, et.al., 1971; Good and Brophy, 1973; Klaus, 1975; Lippitt, 1975

role, develops a sense of responsibility and enjoys a feeling of usefulness and importance within the family; while the younger child, directly and indirectly, learns a variety of things related to home, school and community environments.

This aspect of Black family life can be viewed as an example of cultural strength having roots in the traditional African extended family structure.[13] The interdependence which characterized these kinship groups (which included children, parents, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles and in-laws) is much in evidence among contemporary Black families and their immediate neighbors.

The importance of building upon cultural strengths in constructing educational programs to meet the needs of Black youth has been duly noted by Black scholars, educators and historians. In 1976, Black Child Development Institute Consultant Barbara Huell observed:

> The history and cultural heritage of Black people must form the matrix from which all Black education moves.[14]

In 1977, Chicago Region, Director, Dr. Frances Holliday notes:

> The existence of an African world view suggests a different approach to the problems of Black Education in this country. It suggests that programs must be built on the assumption that Black children, like their white counterparts, are part of an important world heritage, which is a different heritage from the dominant traditions within America. Further, this heritage should be examined to develop ideas of specific cultural strengths from which we can build. This approach will provide continuity between the child, his past, and his living heritage which is after all a crucial purpose of education.[15]

[13] See, e.g., Ferkiss, 1966 [14] Huell, 1976 [15] Holliday, 1977

And, as Lerone Bennett so beautifully expresses it:

> The point is that Blacks ought to be educated from the center of themselves. For in the final analysis, what we seek is not in Plato or Aristotle. What we seek is our wholeness, our authenticity, our faith....[16]

As the U.S. job market continues to decline, and increasingly large numbers of urban youth face the frustration and loss of self-esteem that accompany being poorly educated, unskilled and, as a result, unemployed, involvement in a program such as peer tutoring that is rooted in their African cultural heritage may have a profound effect on their future life experiences.

The re-emergence of peer tutoring is supported by the aforementioned de-emphasis upon group instruction and subsequent emphasis upon individualized instruction. Within this context, peer tutoring appears to offer the obvious advantage of providing a more intimate, less threatening atmosphere in which a child who is experiencing a learning difficulty can interact, on a one-to-one basis, with a peer.

OUR EXPERIENCE WITH INITIATING PEER TUTORING

The members of the Chicago Region of the Documentation and Technical Assistance Project (DTA) are assisting in the planning and development of peer tutoring programs in selected elementary schools within one Black inner city school district. This effort is congruent with our expressed belief that effective educational programs build upon the

[16] Bennett, 1972

strengths of students' cultural heritages. By focusing on these strengths, rather than on what have been viewed as cultural weaknesses or deficiencies, such programs have the decided advantage of truly "meeting the learner where he or she is."

During the summer of 1976, the Technical Assistance Specialist of the Chicago Region of DTA assisted the Instructional Support Staff of Chicago Public School District 21 in implementing a program of instruction for prospective tutors. Groups of fifty students, aged 14 to 20, accompanied by one teacher-coordinator and two college students from the community, participated in the program. These bright and eager young people were introduced to the peer tutoring process with a film, "Youth Tutors Youth",[17] which depicted the experiences of urban Black youths very much like themselves engaging in various tutoring activities. This black and white film was shot in Philadelphia's inner city areas and was narrated by a nineteen year old female Youth Corps leader from the Neighborhood Tutoring Center. Before viewing the film, students were asked, "How many of you have ever helped your younger brothers or sisters with their homework?" Most responded that they had. It was then explained that tutoring is not a new idea, especially in Black families.

Following a brief introductory description, students were instructed to watch the film thoughtfully and to be prepared to answer the following questions:

1. What does it take to be a good tutor?
2. What are some learning activities a tutor can use to help a tutee?

[17] National Commission on Resources for Youth, n.d.

After seeing the film and sharing their reactions, the tutors, working in small groups, participated in a role-playing activity in which one tutor, designated as the "inexperienced" tutor, received helpful hints and suggestions from the "experienced" tutor in his or her group. These suggestions were recorded on newsprint by each "inexperienced" tutor and were later shared with the total group. The session was extremely successful, generating among the students obvious enthusiasm and eagerness to begin their assignment. Some of the important characteristics and behaviors identified by these tutors in training are listed below.

District Group: Important Tutor Characteristics and Behaviors*

Patience
Good rapport/relationship with tutee
Good communication with tutee/Listens and talks to tutee
Understanding/Identifies with tutee
Creative/Imaginative/Exercises initiative
Competent/Good knowledge of subject matter taught
Interested in work and tutee
Makes learning fun/interesting
Likes children/Friendly
Well prepared/Pre-plans
Assessess tutee strengths/weaknesses/interests and gears instruction accordingly
Confident in tutee/Respects tutee
Good attitude
Dependable/Responsible
Encourages tutee
Helpful/Cooperative/Responsive to tutee
Makes tutee feel comfortable and confident
Varies methods/Doesn't pressure tutee
Dedicated/Works to best of his/her ability
Exercises self-control
Self-confident
Learns while teaching
Prompt
Behavior and appearance provide good model for tutee
Open/Honest/Trustworthy
Teaches skills valuable to tutee now and in the future
Draws upon previous teaching/learning experiences

* Listed in descending order of frequency of response.

Tutors also suggested a variety of learning activities which included the following:

District Group: Learning Activities

Rhyme games
Spelling bees
Poetry
Work puzzles
Bingo word games
Picture stories
Card games
Unscrambling words

Following the success of the summer program, our assistance was sought to help plan and develop a peer tutoring program involving forty upper grade tutors from the Open Corridor Program of the Betsy Ross Elementary School.

Calling upon our experience with the Summer Tutorial Program, we decided to use the same techniques that had proven so effective then, i.e. present the film and follow it up with the role-playing activity with emphasis on group sharing of responses. Using the procedure employed during the summer session, the Ross students cited the tutor characteristics and behaviors listed below.

Ross School Group: Important Tutor Characteristics and Behaviors*

Ability to relate to children, tutee
Ability to cope with children and their problems
Getting to know and understand the tutee
Knowing tutee needs and providing many different activities to meet these needs
Noting tutee reactions to work given
Giving advice when needed
Having skills in reading and math
Understanding activities given to tutee/Knowing what he or she is doing
Being patient/Taking enough time with tutee

* Listed in descending order of frequency of response.

Ross School Group: Important Tutor Characteristics and Behaviors* Continued:

Being responsible
Having a good attitude
Using one's brain
Having courage
Using ideas
Sharing

In addition, the following learning activities were suggested.

Ross School Group: Learning Activities

Making and using games
Acting out plays
Writing stories
Writing book reports
Asking questions (about stories, etc.)
Learning phone numbers, addresses, etc.
Spelling games (spelling bees, etc.)
Interviews
Reading (tutor and tutee)
Rhyming word games
Compound word games
Consonant blend games
Vowel sound games
Parts of speech games
Using flash cards
Using art (drawing, painting, cutting things out) for discussion, writing
Using sports
Using songs
Typing
Multiplication games
Trips

In retrospect, it appears that the students who participated in the tutor training sessions had acquired, through the course of their daily living experiences, an almost instinctive awareness of the qualities needed to be an effective tutor. While these qualities are not peculiar to Black people, it is our firm belief that they do represent strengths deep-rooted within the Black heritage; namely, cooperation, collective responsibility, cooperateness and independence.[18]

* Listed in descending order of frequency of response.
[18] Nobles, 1975

EVALUATION

The Ross peer tutoring program was implemented in November of 1976. Periodic, on-site observations made by the Chicago Region Technical Assistance Specialists and the Technical Assistance Analyst were highly encouraging. The tutors being observed were patient, serious, well organized and appeared to genuinely enjoy their task. When asked, they talked freely about their assignments, the progress of their tutee(s), recordkeeping, etc. The tutees, in turn, expressed pleasure - and unspoken pride - in receiving this kind of help.

Subsequent interviews with teachers of both tutors and tutees indicate a generally favorable reaction and a desire to see the program continued. One indication of the success of the program is that teachers in other sections of Ross have asked to have the peer tutoring program expanded to include their students.

An important measure of the success of any program which seeks to improve the quality of education currently being offered is the future school achievement of the students involved in the program, both tutors and tutees. Evaluations based on test scores were done for the District 21 sponsored tutoring program.[19] Results from pre-and post-testing of students showed significant gains for 80% of the tutors and the tutees in the area of reading instruction. The range in reading score gains was from zero to over three years. Mean scores indicating reading gain for tutors varied by centers and ranged from over three months to thir-

[19] Report to Jack Mitchell, Superintendent District 21, 1976

teen months. Mathematics tutoring was limited to one center where the results were clearly positive for tutors. The mean gain was 21 months for mathematics and 27 months for application of mathematics computational skill. Older children showed greater gains in the tutoring program than did younger children. The program was assessed as successful by both the tutors and their supervisors. Based on our experience at the schools thus far, it is our belief that using Black youth as a resource can help in the overall enhancement of the learning program and that observable gains can be made by tutor and tutee in both the affective and cognitive areas. In the final analysis, the greatest test of the value of the peer tutoring programs being implemented in District 21 will be the participation and support of all members of the school community.

Peer tutoring as it currently goes on in District 21 is much like other peer tutoring programs. However, we now see visible evidence of traditional Black cultural strengths such as sharing and sibling-like warmth of expression. As we continue our efforts in this area, our Technical Assistance Team will provide training programs designed to instruct school/community members - including students - in the techniques of integrating such elements as Afro-rhythmns, African myths and folklore, griots*, etc., into daily learning experiences. It is our sincere expectation that once this is accomplished the peer tutoring programs in District 21 will become models for others desiring to implement similar programs.

* Oral historian (West Africa).

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